

August 24, 2012

Tukwila Planning Commission
6300 Southcenter Boulevard, Suite 100
Tukwila, WA 98188

Re: Proposed Urban Center Plan for Southcenter

Honorable Commission Members:

I am writing on behalf of my client WEA Southcenter LLC ("Westfield"), the owner of Southcenter Mall, regarding the proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan Southcenter Chapter, the Southcenter Subarea Plan, the Southcenter Design Manual, and related code changes to TMC 18.28 Tukwila Urban Center (TUC).

Over the past several years, Westfield has been an active participant in the City's development of new plans and codes to transform the Southcenter area into a true urban center. We have provided formal testimony to the Planning Commission on earlier drafts, participated in stakeholder meetings, and worked closely with staff to address specific concerns.

The current proposal has been significantly improved from earlier drafts. Staff has listened to Westfield's concerns and worked on language that meets the City's long-term goals for this urban center while recognizing the need to encourage continued investment at Southcenter Mall. While Westfield and staff have, on occasion, had to agree to disagree on certain elements of the proposed code and design manual, the final documents are generally workable for Westfield.

In recent weeks, in response to comments from Westfield and others, staff has identified a matrix of additional recommended changes to proposed Chapter 18.28 and the proposed Design Manual. We support the additional revisions in this matrix and ask the Planning Commission to incorporate them into the final recommended package.

There is one provision in Chapter 18.28 that remains open. We ask the Planning Commission to consider a change to proposed Section 18.28.030.C.2. That section now reads:

2. *Expansions of existing buildings shall meet all requirements for the new portions of the structure, and any alterations to non-conforming landscape areas or parking lots shall be made in accordance with the standards in TMC Chapter 18.70. If design review is triggered limited to*

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the exterior of the existing portion of the structure may be required to aesthetically unify the structure.

The underlined sentence above authorizes the City to require modifications to portions of a structure not being expanded. Because of the aggregate complexities of the Mall, as well as being viewed as a whole, several concerns have been raised by Westfield.

First, what is meant by “limited modifications?” No guidance is provided and no constraints are placed on the type or extent of modifications that could be imposed by the City. The costs of such “limited modifications” could make the expansion too expensive to build.

Second, what is meant by “the existing portion of the structure?” For a facility like Southcenter Mall the quoted language could be used to impose exterior alterations far from a small expansion.

Third, with this language, an expansion by one department store could trigger an obligation on Westfield to modify exterior areas of the Mall beyond that department store.

We recommend deletion of the last sentence of Section 18.28.030.C.2 to avoid these three problems. Moreover, this language is not needed to achieve the City’s design objections.

The proposed Design Manual already imposes an obligation on every design review applicant to “develop an architectural design expression that unifies the massing and components . . . into a cohesive and consistent thematic or stylistic architectural character or style . . .” (See Architectural Context, Design Criteria A). The Design Manual also states that “Buildings with multiple tenant spaces shall display a unifying concept or architectural expression while simultaneously utilizing a varied palette of form, materials and colors between buildings to prevent monotony (See Architectural Context, Design Criteria C). These standards give the City ample authority to achieve its design objectives for a proposed building expansion without imposing an obligation to modify other portions of the existing structure.

We understand that staff has amended its comment matrix to propose an example to the Architectural Concept Design Criteria D, recognizing that an existing building could be modified to create compatibility with the design of a proposed addition. This example is acceptable to Westfield and supports eliminating the last sentence of Section 18.28.030.C.2.

With this one change and the revisions proposed by staff in its matrix, Westfield supports adoption of the plans and codes that staff has presented for your consideration and encourages your favorable recommendation to the City Council.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Brent Carson", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Brent Carson

BC:lk1